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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
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09/975,257

10/12/2001

Sundar Narayanan

PM01021

8852

60909

7590

01/16/2009

CYPRESS SEMICONDUCTOR CORPORATION  
198 CHAMPION COURT  
SAN JOSE, CA 95134-1709

EXAMINER

CHAN, CANDICE

ART UNIT

PAPER NUMBER

2813

MAIL DATE

DELIVERY MODE

01/16/2009

PAPER

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RECORD OF ORAL HEARING

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

BEFORE THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS  
AND INTERFERENCES

Ex parte SUNDAR NARAYANAN  
and KRISHNASWAMY RAMKUMAR

Appeal 2008-4017  
Application 09/975,257  
Technology Center 2800

Oral Hearing Held: Wednesday, October 22, 2008

Before BRADLEY R. GARRIS, PETER F. KRATZ, and  
MICHAEL P. COLAIANNI, Administrative Patent Judges

ON BEHALF OF THE APPELLANTS:

STEVEN B. KELBER, ESQ.

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Fairfax, VA 22030

1           The above-entitled matter came on for hearing on Wednesday,  
2   October 22, 2008, commencing at 1:40 p.m., at the U.S. Patent and  
3   Trademark Office, 600 Dulany Street, 9th Floor, Hearing Room D,  
4   Alexandria, Virginia, before Kevin Carr, Notary Public.

5           JUDGE KRATZ: Good afternoon, Mr. Kelber.

6           MR. KELBER: Good afternoon, Your Honors. Thank you for  
7   this opportunity to address the Board. This is calendar number 28 and the  
8   application is 09/975,257.

9           The invention and the principal reference in this case as you see  
10   are very closely related. The -- without dwelling on the background of the  
11   technology, the invention addresses a quality control issue in manufacturing  
12   lines for semiconductors.

13           And that is the thickness and the placing of a nitrided protective  
14   layer for a gate electrode. The amount of nitrogen present and its placement  
15   relative to the gate itself is a critical issue and presents a variety of quality  
16   control issues.

17           As I said, the principal reference although it's brief and doesn't  
18   tell us a lot about why it should work, is very, very close. And there's no  
19   sense just belaboring the point that the Yasushi reference does in fact  
20   describe forming a nitride protective layer.

21           It does in fact re-oxidize that protective layer. There are two  
22   important differences or one important difference and one silence and really  
23   that's what I want to focus primarily on today.

24           The important difference: the claims specify nitric oxide, NO as  
25   the source for the nitrogen for the nitrided layer. The reference specifies  
26   nitrous oxide.

1           That's an important difference and the Examiner recognized  
2   that early on and the Examiner relies on a secondary reference, U.S. Patent  
3   6,372,581, Bensahel to supply that teaching.

4           We suggest to you that the reliance on that secondary reference  
5   is not in accordance with the standards of 35 U.S.C. 103. Bensahel does in  
6   fact describe nitride in using both nitrous and nitric oxide.

7           But the reference doesn't suggest that you can substitute one for  
8   the other. And in fact, quite to the contrary Bensahel teaches those of  
9   ordinary skill in the art that nitrated layers prepared from nitrous oxide, the  
10   source of the Yasushi layer are plagued with a variety of problems.

11          And that prior art layers formed from nitric oxide are also  
12   phased with a variety of problems and that instead, to get a good nitrated  
13   layer you need to use nitric oxide -- nitric oxide, sorry, at a very low  
14   temperature, what is a relatively low temperature.

15          Temperature is not going above 700 degrees C. That's  
16   important because both the principal reference, the claims, and the rest of the  
17   art relied upon as well as the teaching of another reference USEF that's a  
18   record in this case, focus on the use of high temperatures RTP 900 degrees  
19   and above.

20          You wouldn't substitute the nitric oxide layer of Bensahel for  
21   the nitrous oxide layer of Yasushi because Yasushi specifically requires  
22   although we don't know many details of that principal reference, specifically  
23   requires 900 degrees C for the re-oxidizing temperature.

24          And that's a condition very similar to the conditions set forth in  
25   the current claims. So there are not equipped ones. One wouldn't go into  
26   the secondary reference to select out nitrous -- I'm sorry, nitric oxide to put  
27   it in the nitrous oxide.

1           One would go one way with one process with low temperatures  
2 which is not a great process for a high speed production because of the low  
3 temperature as Wolfe teaches us, and that's a tertiary reference if you will.

4           The high temperatures that are consistent with RTP processing  
5 allow for high speed manufacturing. That's Yasushi, that's Wolf, that's the  
6 claimed invention. That's not Bensahel.

7           KSR made it a lot -- KSR decreased the need to find a specific  
8 reference for combination of the teachings of reference A with the teachings  
9 of reference B.

10          If you've got all the limitations and they would do what is  
11 expected by the reference in combination KSR says that may be enough.

12          But KSR did not eliminate the requirement that we consider the  
13 teachings as a whole. That fourth reference that I mentioned teaches us  
14 something else.

15          It specifically teaches us that nitrous oxide and nitric oxide  
16 sourced nitrided layers are different. They're different in composition and  
17 they're different in the way they migrate under application of heat and that's  
18 the second thing I wanted to talk with you about.

19          Because the Yasushi is silent and the Examiner acknowledges  
20 that silence with respect to a limitation of all the independent claims that  
21 were rejected and that is when you oxidize or some people say re-oxidize  
22 this nitrided layer, you distance the nitrided gate oxide layer from the  
23 substrate interface itself.

24          That's an important processing step because although the  
25 nitrogen layer, the nitrided layer is there to protect against dopent  
26 penetration, the presence of nitrogen at that interface is itself an adverse  
27 dopent or a poison to the construction of that mosfat.

1                   And so it matters according to USEF what source you chose  
2 and it matters according to the claims because, while again we don't know a  
3 whole lot about the processing conditions where Yasushi is silent on what  
4 happens to that nitrided layer Wolf will teach you and Bensahel describes a  
5 process that puts the nitrided protective layer adjacent to the interface almost  
6 atomic face distance.

7                   And that's the important thing. That's why USEF is relied  
8 upon by applicants here because they do teach that that's a property of the  
9 nitrous oxide generated layers but that nitric oxide layers have the opposite  
10 motion.

11                  They move away. Well, the Examiner says it would be  
12 inherent. Inherency is a problem I think in an obviousness rejection of this  
13 type where you're combining high temperatures and low temperatures or  
14 you're combining source A and source B because there's no way for  
15 Appellants here to duplicate whatever it is the Examiner has in mind and  
16 show that it is or is not the same result.

17                  Inherency is typically the standard in an anticipation rejection.  
18 But what we do know is that temperature matters and source matters.

19                  A nitric oxide, according to the references, source nitrided layer  
20 on re-oxidation will not always move, distance itself from that interface.

21                  A nitrous oxide sourced layer, when treated at the temperatures  
22 the principal reference calls for, 900 degrees will move toward the surface,  
23 the semiconductor substrate surface.

24                  So it's not inherent. It depends on what set of conditions you  
25 choose. And the law on inherency tells us that it has to happen all the time.

26                  There are minor differences in some of the claims and a minor  
27 difference in the principal reference which mentions thickness and therefore

1 nitrogen content on the rate of nitrogen formation rather than the actual  
2 thickness versus a database thickness for claims 19 and 23.

3 But truly they are trivial compared to this major difference.  
4 One last note on the combination of references cited by the Examiner;  
5 Bensahel doesn't talk about re-oxidation.

6 And that's the problem because the reference, the primary  
7 reference in the claims are along the first point and the second point the  
8 same except for that source of nitrous.

9 JUDGE KRATZ: That primary reference doesn't really seem  
10 to indicate while there is only one source, it doesn't seem to indicate that  
11 that's critical to that.

12 MR. KELBER: I think that that's accurate. It doesn't indicate  
13 criticality or absence of criticality. I believe the nitrous and nitric oxide  
14 sources were being used for protection. So if in fact you could use it  
15 according to the principal reference I think that it would fault that.

16 JUDGE KRATZ: And is there a technical reason why you  
17 think that that would be the case, that it is in the reference?

18 MR. KELBER: Nitrous oxide is a lot easier to work with from  
19 the point of view of speed. That's not in the reference. It's in Wolf. Speed  
20 is the dominant issue in the formation of thin film semiconductors.

21 But that's a guess. That's not specifically taught by any of the  
22 references. The -- there is an interesting passage in Wolf, though, that  
23 might give some insight on that.

24 And that is that -- and this is -- I'm sorry, this is on page 269 of  
25 Wolf -- I'm sorry, I've done it again. That's page 269 of USEF. I think  
26 that's the right pronunciation and that's page 269 in the left hand column.

1                   And it indicates that as opposed to nitrous oxide annealed films,  
2 the nitric oxide annealed film has a much higher concentration of nitrogen  
3 near the interface. Remember that's a blessing and a curse.

4                   If you use nitric oxide you get more nitrogen. That's not hardly  
5 a chemical surprise but you get it where you really don't want it and unless  
6 you, like the claims recognize that you can solve that problem by re-  
7 oxidizing at a -- re-oxidizing the nitrified layer to move it, to distance it from  
8 that interface.

9                   I think that's a disincentive to one of skill in the art to use it.

10                  JUDGE KRATZ: Now your own Specification indicates that it  
11 could go toward or away, right?

12                  MR. KELBER: It indicates both and it indicates that there's --

13                  JUDGE KRATZ: The edge is to each.

14                  MR. KELBER: Yeah, it does indicate that with nitric oxide the  
15 re-oxidation process should distance the nitrified layer away and with nitrous  
16 oxide -- it doesn't specify which one.

17                  It says you can do one or the other. You can drive it toward the  
18 interface.

19                  JUDGE KRATZ: Toward or away.

20                  MR. KELBER: And I think given USEF, given Wolf, what  
21 you're seeing is a failure to repeat that if you use nitrous oxide you keep the  
22 protective layer close to the interface which the application talks about.

23                  If you use nitric oxide on re-oxidation you distance it on the  
24 interface. In terms of processing advantages, what's being claimed here is  
25 the left hand side, the nitric oxide.

26                  JUDGE KRATZ: So basically you are disclosing either one as  
27 an advantage and as a disadvantage to some extent.



1           MR. KELBER: They both have disadvantages to some extent.  
2   That's correct.

3           JUDGE KRATZ: Which would have been recognized by the  
4   prior reference standard?

5           MR. KELBER: I'm sorry, recognized?

6           JUDGE KRATZ: Based on USEF as you stated?

7           MR. KELBER: USEF recognizes the same difference in  
8   patterns, yes. But what it teaches is that they are not substitutes, not that  
9   they are substitutes.

10           So if you take a reference, a primary reference that says I want  
11   nitrous oxide then your goal or the ability to manipulate that layer on re-  
12   oxidation is already set.

13           And you're going to follow that right hand of teachings which  
14   says, okay, you have a lower nitrogen content, you have it closer to the  
15   interface.

16           You're not going to go to a reference that says go the other  
17   way.

18           JUDGE KRATZ: The primary goal though was really just to  
19   measure the amount of nitrogen in the layer.

20           MR. KELBER: That is the absolute goal of both references.

21           JUDGE KRATZ: Of both references?

22           MR. KELBER: Yes; of both the claims and the --

23           JUDGE KRATZ: And it is a subsidiary thing that you can go  
24   toward or away depending on which one you use so --

25           MR. KELBER: I don't want to say it's a subsidiary thing  
26   whether you go toward or away. It's an important thing. It's a processing  
27   element.

1           What the application points out fairly consistently throughout is  
2 that this does -- this is not a cure for the common cold. This is not a new  
3 paradigm in making semiconductor gates.

4           But it points out that the problem is these things are in a line.  
5 These things are going forward. You can't use the existing technology, the  
6 Sims Measurement technology in that environment so you've got to find  
7 another way.

8           So this allows you to continue processing and do an important  
9 processing step which is properly locate the nitrided layer that has been re-  
10 oxidized.

11           JUDGE KRATZ: Which is the same thing that the Yasushi was  
12 directed towards to, I believe.

13           MR. KELBER: The Yasushi reference would probably direct --  
14 - if you follow the 900 degrees re-oxidation and you have the other step, the  
15 other conditions proper, the Yasushi is probably going to do the opposite  
16 thing because it uses nitrous oxide.

17           The references will tell us you can go the other way.

18           JUDGE KRATZ: But they're trying to get away from the Sims  
19 as well too. The same problems include the -- they're trying to get away  
20 from Sims by --

21           MR. KELBER: Well, you've got a choice of what problem you  
22 want to pick.

23           JUDGE KRATZ: Yes.

24           MR. KELBER: And I think it's fair to say that the working  
25 environment of the application and the introduction of the application  
26 teaches you these are choices you have to make.

27           These are not choices that the prior art that is cited lead you to.

1 JUDGE KRATZ: A quick technical matter; this Yasushi  
2 reference. We have two different translations of record and one lists the  
3 name as Iwata, Hiroshi Iwata, the other listed as Yasushi.

4 You're aware of that, right?

5 MR. KELBER: Yes. My understanding from speaking with  
6 the Examiner, it's not a record interview. It's the machine translation which  
7 has some additional information in it is what is being relied on.

8 And it is the machine translation that actually tells us what the  
9 conditions for re-oxidation to be used are that allow you to conclude that's  
10 not right for Bensahel.

11 JUDGE GARRIS: Where is the disclosure in the machine  
12 translation? Can you point it out to us please?

13 MR. KELBER: The conditions? That's -- it's just about in the  
14 middle of what is the second page of the machine translation. I'd just read it  
15 to you.

16 If you look at the left hand column it starts out with 0.0191 and  
17 then it says "and the N<sub>2</sub>O flow rate of a re-oxidation rate are 5 SLM and  
18 processing temperature/900 degrees C" which is consistent with the RTP  
19 conditions.

20 JUDGE GARRIS: And that was just an example of your point  
21 of reference?

22 MR. KELBER: That's all we have, yeah. It's not a direction  
23 that you must use that but if you're looking for speed in a processing line  
24 like this and Yasushi is dedicated to that prospect, don't stop it so you can  
25 take a measurement.

26 You are going to use RTP. Wolf makes that point. And if  
27 you're going to use RTP you're going to use at least 900 to 1050 degrees C.

1                   So I think while it's an example it's consistent with what if  
2 Yasushi were a fuller specification the inventor who taught it. Certainly  
3 consistent with what those of skill in this particular art would draw.

4                   That, okay, here's another teaching. The teaching of the claims  
5 or the requirements of the claims and the teaching of the references we  
6 observed at the outset today are very, very close.

7                   JUDGE KRATZ: And what you're talking about, by the way,  
8 in that section of USEF is the -- you're talking about the re-oxidation and  
9 not the nitridation?

10                  MR. KELBER: Not the nitridation.

11                  JUDGE GARRIS: And the nitridation step was, the difference  
12 was temperature that you were referring to earlier with respect to Yasushi  
13 teaching that if you want to use a lower nitridization temperature?

14                  MR. KELBER: I'm sorry, it's Bensahel that teaches.

15                  JUDGE GARRIS: Bensahel teaches that but it's not the re-  
16 oxidation.

17                  MR. KELBER: Yes.

18                  JUDGE GARRIS: So you're trying to compare the RTP for the  
19 one, the nitrating step with the RTP for the re-oxidation step?

20                  MR. KELBER: I'm not trying to compare them but it's the  
21 next step in line. The same temperature conditions are going to be there.

22                  If you read USEF and Wolf the RTP conditions are applied to  
23 both conventionally, are applied to both nitriding and re-oxidation.

24                  JUDGE GARRIS: So you wouldn't -- you're saying that you  
25 wouldn't use -- if you were going to use RTP for the re-oxidation then you  
26 would have used RTP for the nitriding?

1                   MR. KELBER: That's correct. You would not use it but in  
2 different special situation particularly --

3                   JUDGE GARRIS: You would need a different tool; is that the  
4 problem?

5                   MR. KELBER: I'm sorry?

6                   JUDGE GARRIS: You need a different tool?

7                   MR. KELBER: You need a different tool. You need a  
8 minimum but you need a cooling step in your line. You're either moving  
9 from one tool to the other or you're stopping.

10                  And now these are chemical processes that are not definite end  
11 points. So if you -- if your nitriding conditions are heat sensitive and you  
12 apply too much heat you're going to get the problems that Bensahel suggests  
13 you're going to get.

14                  You're not going to nitride and then immediately step to a  
15 higher heat condition because they're still going to affect that layer.

16                  So if it's a nitrous -- nitric oxide layer that's elevated to a  
17 higher heat you're still going to run into the same problem. There is no  
18 chemical treatment or modification between nitriding and if you will, re-  
19 oxidation.

20                  And that's why in Bensahel although it doesn't deal with re-  
21 oxidization and it wasn't an object they are aware of RTP and they teach  
22 away from it.

23                  And that's at column one, line -- the paragraph beginning at  
24 about line 37 which specifically says, well, the prior teaches you to make a  
25 nitrided layer.

26                  Not re-oxidation alone but to make a nitrided layer use RTP.  
27 Don't do that. I think it's a fair conclusion reflected of those of skill in the

1 art that Bensahel is a teaching to stay away from RTP when you're  
2 manipulating or processing nitrided layers.

3 JUDGE GARRIS: Okay, but there's been advances made in  
4 the RTP process where maybe it's more acceptable now, right, because they  
5 haven't conducted subsequent to this reference being; is that true?

6 Is that what the -- is that what the other reference in the  
7 beginning was relying on for the --

8 MR. KELBER: The Li reference or Wolf?

9 JUDGE GARRIS: Wolf.

10 MR. KELBER: Well, Wolf comes along and says RTP is great,  
11 it's the dominant process, here's where you use it, here's where you don't.

12 If you look at an item in paragraph three of the critical page,  
13 you learn that RTP is consistent with short processing times and that's page  
14 309.

15 JUDGE GARRIS: Right.

16 MR. KELBER: So you've got one set of references, the  
17 yasushi, Li, USEF, all talking about if you use modern high speed, high  
18 temperature processing here's what happens.

19 And you've got a reference, Bensahel that says, don't do that; I  
20 know all about RTP which Wolfe says is the dominant way to do it. I want a  
21 much slower, much lower processing temperature.

22 Okay, then that's a choice you make but you make it with the  
23 intended ills and one of them is you teach away from the claimed invention  
24 which wants to get to the goal in a processing line, not in a much slower  
25 cooler environment with a different tool.

26 Thank you, gentlemen. I appreciate the opportunity.

27 JUDGE GARRIS: Any other questions?

1 JUDGE COLAIANNI: No questions.  
2 JUDGE GARRIS: Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate your  
3 help here.  
4 Whereupon, the hearing was concluded at 2:10 p.m.